CRITICS CHOICE MAGAZINE
FOCUS ON

WATCHMEN

ISSUES 1 THROUGH 4

BY
JAMES
VAN
HISE

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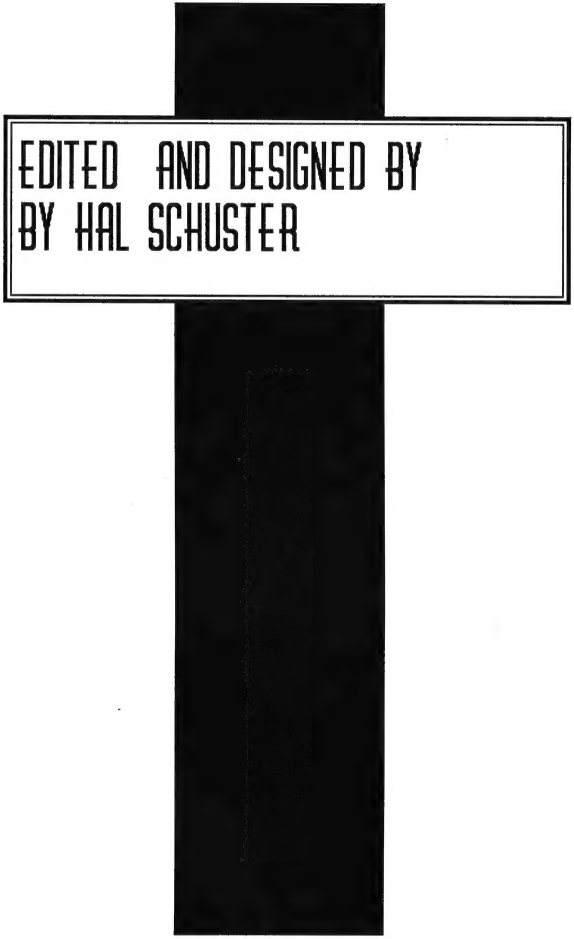
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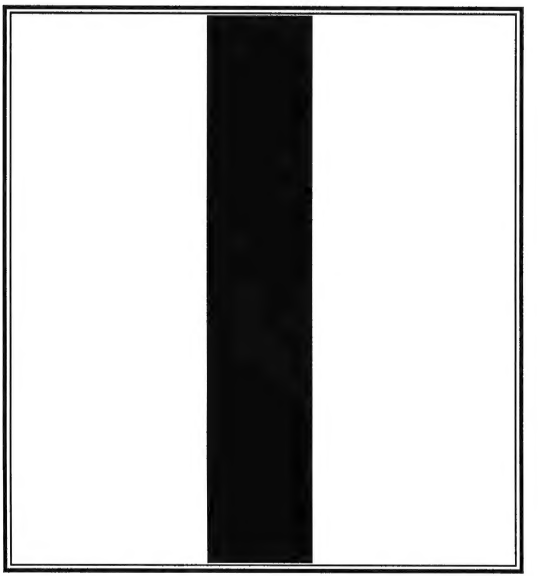

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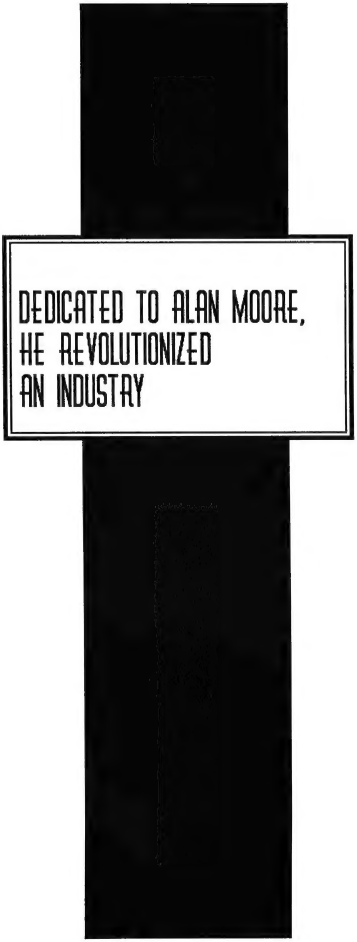
DEDICATED TO ALAN MOORE,
HE REVOLUTIONIZED
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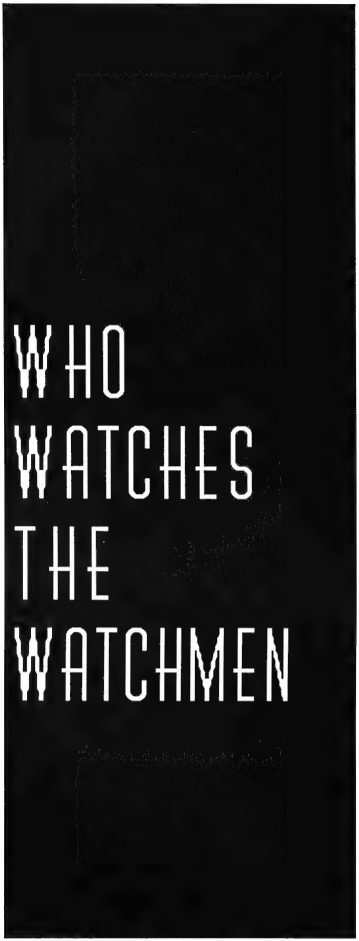
WHO
WATCHES
THE
WATCHMEN

ISSUES 1 TO 4

INTRO

Tcal underpinnings of the concept of the costumed vigilante. While it covers some of the same ground.as THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS (which was conceived and drawn almost simultaneous with THE WATCHMEN), it doesn't embrace the costumed hero quite so much, nor deal with the need of the common man for a symbolic extension of himself.

THE WATCHMEN postulates a world very much like our own. Most comic books present the superhero in a setting we could easily mistake for our own world. Whether the locale is called Metropolis, Midway City or New York, it sure looks like home! But, of course, it isn't. We don't get up in the morning to headlines shouting the latest exploits of The Flash or The Fantastic Four. This is the logic of THE WATCHMEN. It presents a world just like ours, but then starts changing it in the ways it would be altered by the existence of costumed heroes

Balances are altered. Even comic books take a different direction, because kids aren't interested in reading about make-believe costumed heroes when there are real ones running around. Comics about pirates are popular even though, in our world, pirate comics have never been successful.

The biggest impact on reality is made by the existence of Dr. Manhattan, the world's first true "superhero," a man who has the power to do virtually anything, and does. He affects not just the balance of power by winning the Vietnam war for America, but manufactures rare elements so that electric cars become the order of the day. And with the winning of the Southeast Asian conflict, Richard Nixon gains such popularity that the congress repeals the two term limitation on holding office, so that while elected in 1968, Nixon is still President in 1985 when the world approaches the brink of nuclear conflict.

On the street level, we see the suspicion people have for the masked vigilante, as evidenced by the phrase "Who Watches The Watchmen?" This distrust ultimately leads to resentment by the

police, who are empowered to fight crime and must operate by the rules while the vigilantes operate by their own unwritten code.

WATCHMEN #7 gives one example of how such adventurers can be useful by rescuing people from disasters, such as fires. Throughout the series it is shown that while putting on the costume carries a unique thrill, the thrill of combat is something else again. It's certainly something that The Comedian understands.

These self-styled defenders of the public place themselves above the people they defend, taking on authority not granted. This is explored to its extreme in the person of Adrian Veidt, who decides to save the world and is willing to trade a few million lives so that billions more will live.

He makes this decision entirely on his own. The appellation of "the smartest man in the world" has gone to his head. He believes that whatever he decides must ultimately be right. Once he carries out his plan, the others must decide whether to expose his scheme and allow those who have already died have died in vain or to keep quietfoelp the world survive.

THE WATCHMEN is a comic book we can give to people who hate comic books--and not be embarrassed. While there's a lot of comics we read and enjoy, to the general public they all look pretty much the same: people in skin-tight costumes look silly. While THE WATCHMEN doesn't dispute that, it does show how they can also be interesting. It shows how the superhero can form the basis of a serious story exploring serious themes told in a provocative manner.

To prove to a disbelieving world that comics aren't just for kids, we're left with precious little in the realm of the superhero. THE WATCHMEN may be the best. It is to be hoped that many more books of equal value, exploring different but equally important themes, will follow.

WATCHMEN
ONE

WATCHMEN I

"At Midnight, All the Agents..."

From the day comics began, from the days when the Yellow Kid made faces at himself from rival panels, through Little Nemo's surreal adventures in Slumberland, through the days when four color men flew, comics has been waiting for **THE WATCHMEN**. No one in the medium knew what it would be called or who would conceive it, but as comics went through the inevitable evolution and demanded to be regarded as more than just disposable literature for children, the form was waiting for that one story which would coalesce what so many other writers had been fighting to achieve, to once and for all redefine what comic books could be.

THE RETURN OF THE DARK KNIGHT by Frank Miller, published just before THE WATCHMEN began to appear, came very close to doing that. Very close. In many ways, **THE DARK KNIGHT** tackles the same themes as **THE WATCHMEN**, but on narrower levels. Where Frank Miller deals with the hero as he is defined within the emotional decay of a city (any city--it just happens to be called Gotham), Alan Moore deals with the hero in the face of all of reality. He deals with how those heroes live in a world on the brink of self-destruction.

"At Midnight, All The Agents..." opens with a tight shot on a pool of blood running into a sewer. The gore is dripping onto and running around a happy face button. While this plastic face remains eternally optimistic in the face of horror, it is perhaps the only thing in the story that does.

As we pull back from the blood, as though recoiling, we see a red-haired man walking uncaring through the mess, seemingly cognizant only of the sign he is carrying which proclaims: THE END IS NIGH. Later revelations would seem to in-

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dicate that this man is Rorschach, whose journal is quoted on this opening page.

He is dwelling on the subject the sign warns against, and he blames all future victims for bringing it on themselves and not listening to him when they had the chance. While he observes that all of those fools will be standing on the brink of doom not knowing what to save when the time comes, the scene completes its fluid segue from street level to dizzying height as a man looks out a broken wind and observes, "Hmm. That's quite a drop." In one page Alan Moore has placed us in the heart of his milieu, his alternate reality where a man is so obsessed with what the world as a whole is coming to that he doesn't care about the bloody footsteps he leaves behind him.

The tie-in between scenes is accomplished similarly on page 3 when the police discuss how The Comedian was murdered and observe that he must have been hurled through the window. Over the visualization of these scenes is the elevator operator's response to the policemen's request to go down with a small caption reading, "Ground floor comin' up." It emphasizes the mordant humor we'll be encountering in the series as well as showing the self-conscious care Moore is taking with the structure of every page.

I once heard Martin Pasko, a writer for Marvel and D.C. as well as for such television shows as ***THE NEW TWILIGHT ZONE***, explain how a story should be structured. He mentioned that a new sequence shouldn't begin in the middle of a page because it disrupts pacing and is sloppy. Yet nearly every comic book writer structures their stories with breaks in the middle of pages. Pasko made me very conscious of that. I immediately noticed when Alan Moore very carefully developed his mood and structure in the story by treating a page as a sentence, and beginning a new sentence with each new page.

Moore leaves clues whose meanings are unclear except in the context of the entire story. On page 4, the cons are talking about Rorschach, the vigilante who never retired when they all were legally required to. As they pass the red-haired man carrying the sign, one of the policemen feels a shiver, but just thinks he's getting cold. He doesn't know he just walked past Rorschach. The readers doesn't know it either until the vigilante is unmasked several issues later. Elements like this al-

low the story to operate on many levels at once.

While it has immediate impact from the force of the narrative, layered into the background are details which fill in the sociological backdrop effortlessly. Other details relate to things the story hasn't gotten to yet and won't for several issues.

Rorschach emerges as a pivotal character in the series, and we don't even know that he appears on the first page of the first issue except through the words of his journal. The journal itself becomes vitally important later. The last page of the last issue of **WATCHMEN** makes us wonder whether the first page of the first issue has an entirely different focus.

The story is a true novel in comic book form with the incumbent subtleties and demands made upon the reader. It's a story one can enjoy on a superficial level but delivers the greater intensity of involvement comics fans look for in four-color melodrama. You have to pay attention. I read the first issue three times the first month I had it and each reading produced additional richness of experience. How many comics can you say that about?

THE WATCHMEN presents a more carefully wrought and detailed style of storytelling than has been deemed possible in comics before now. Only someone of the stature of Alan Moore could have attempted it, otherwise it would have been deemed too experimental. While it's experimental for comic books it certainly wouldn't be in any other branch of literature. Moore decided it was time for comics to catch up.

The background of this world starts being filled in with a newspaper headline glimpsed on page 4: VIETNAM 51st STATE! OFFICIAL! A photo found in the murdered man's apartment shows him with Vice-President Ford and later we discern that Richard Nixon is still President. The Watergate incident never happened. Such political figures do not play large roles in this narrative, though. Most events occur at street level.

Page 5 introduces the costumed Rorschach in a beautiful sequence. It shows how well Dave Gibbons can render scenes of classic costumed adventurers.

This issue also introduces the rest of the cast of characters after Rorschach visits the apartment of the murdered man and discovers that he used to be the costumed adventurer, The Comedian. When he visits the other former vigilantes to inform them of the murder of the Comedian, we meet Dan Dreiberg, the Night Owl (and see his

workshop, which will play an important role) and Dr. Manhattan, another pivotal figure.

Rorschach's name comes from his mask, which looks like a psychiatrist's inkblot test and changes in every panel. This is not an affectation of the artist although until it's explained in a later issue it becomes another of those amusing details of the story.

In passing we meet Hollis Mason, the first Night Owl, now an old man in retirement. He wrote a book some years back titled **UNDER THE HOOD**, an autobiography which also encapsulate much of the history of the masked crimefighters movement. It was an unvarnished portrayal of the motives and fantasies that drive someone to fight crime in a Halloween costume. As does **THE WATCHMEN** itself, the excerpts from **UNDER THE HOOD** make it difficult to look at costumed heroes the same way again. The brief glimpse of the apartment where old Hollis lives shows that among his books is **GLADIATOR** by Philip Wylie, the book acknowledged as being the inspiration for the creation of Superman by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel.

On his way home, wesee some of the city, which looks like the New York City we know except that the cars appear different--another detail explained later. A newspaper headline (and they're usually obscured so that we can just translate what they say) reveals that Russia is protesting U.S. troop advances in Afghanistan. Even in the sky, there are incongruities. Periodically we see dirigibles, something which became obsolete in the Forties, although they are actually starting to come back into commercial use today.

A comic book standby is the hero going to a saloon to get information. Happy Harry's Bar & Grill has spray painted slogans on it including "Viet Bronx" while a newspaper proclaims: CONGRESS APPROVES LUNAR SILOS. We sometimes ask ourselves how the Cold War get worse without heating up. Space based missiles would be one way, but we're not that far gone yet. The world of **THE WATCHMEN** is.

Inside the bar, we learn why Rorschach is so feared. Everybody is on pins and needles when he walks in. The bartender (Happy Harry) tries to put on a pleasant demeanor but finally breaks down and pleads with Rorschach not to kill anybody. When one of the customers makes fun of Rorschach, the vigilante quietly walks up to the man and begins breaking his fingers while requesting information on the murder of Ed-

ward Blake. Finally he realizes no one there knows anything and he chooses to leave.

Outwardly he is calm and unaffected by the brutality he has just perpetrated. Inwardly he's distracted and clearly feels apart from these people as the captions, extracts from his journal, reveal: "First visit of evening fruitless. Nobody knew anything. Feel slightly depressed. The city is dying of rabies. Is the best I can do to wipe random flecks of foam from lips? Never despair. Never surrender. I leave the human cockroaches to discuss their heroin and child pornography. I have business elsewhere with a better class of person."

Rorschach has become like a policeman who has dealt with the criminal element so long that everyone he meets is suspect. While he claims to be protecting the innocents, he would be hardpressed to explain who those innocents are or where they live. He has contempt for everyone.

The "better class of person" he goes to see is Adrian Veidt, a former vigilante who retired two years before all such costumed adventurers were outlawed by an act of Congress. He's become a rich man, head of a multinational corporation. Rorschach's journal reveals that he's contemptuous of Veidt as well, and of his "shallow, liberal affectations." He wonders whether Veidt could be homosexual and considers that worth investigating.

The sequence here with Veidt takes on greater importance in retrospect. The series ultimately reveals him to be the engineer behind the events of the story. There are no clues to his culpability even though we now understand everything that's going on. Only after completing the series does the significance of him standing at the window, looking out on the grey, raindrenched city while the newspaper on his desk predicts that the nuclear doomsday is fast approaching, become clear. Only then can we understand that he's wondering whether his fantastic scheme will avert it.

Rorschach next visits the only true "superhero" in this reality. Dr. Manhattan (a cross between Charlton's Capt. Atom and Gold Key's Dr. Solar) is capable of anything. He can teleport himself or anyone else short or long distances (including to other planets) and is America's secret weapon . He keeps the Soviet Union in check as he can neutralize anything they attempt. This creates a forced peace, and an uneasy one. His political impact was demonstrated years before when he won the war in Vietnam for

America.

Dr. Manhattan has blue skin,keeping with his cool, outwardly emotionless personality. He always speaks of human affairs as though he is watching them from a distance.

Laurie Juspeczyk is Dr. Manhattan's companion. a former vigilante a the daughter of a vigilante. Her connection is complicated by the connection between her mother and The Comedian.

.Although it isn't obvious here, Laurie is growing restive as the companion of a being who no longer seems to possess human emotions. but can only replicate them in response to what the people he deals with expect. Rorschach's visit prods her into contacting Dan. whom she hasn't seen in a long time.

Before we see their little reunion, we observe Rorschach on his way home. He passes a sign announcing the forthcoming appearance of the rock group Pale Horse in Madison Square Garden. Next to them on the fence is the name of another group, Krystalnacht (a name meaning "the night of the broken glass," a night in Nazi Germany when the windows of German Jewish shopkeepers were smashed--it marked the beginning of the nightmare of the holocaust). Both of these references, while seeming beneath notice in this panel on page 24, come to horrible life in issue 12.

A notation made here by Rorschach in his journal, serves as his epitaph as it explains what drives him to his end twelve issues later: "Because there is good and there is evil, and evil must be punished. even in the face of Armageddon I shall not compromise in this."

Despite Laurie's early description of Rorschach as a "maggot," she actually laughs at a horrendous anecdote that Dan tells about a masochistic man who pretended to be a villain in order to get heaten up, and who was dropped down an elevator shaft by Rorschach. Laurie finds that hilarious and it seems to break the tension and reveal the fact that she hasn't laughed at anything in a long time. To this Dan observes, "Well, what do you expect? The Comedian is dead."

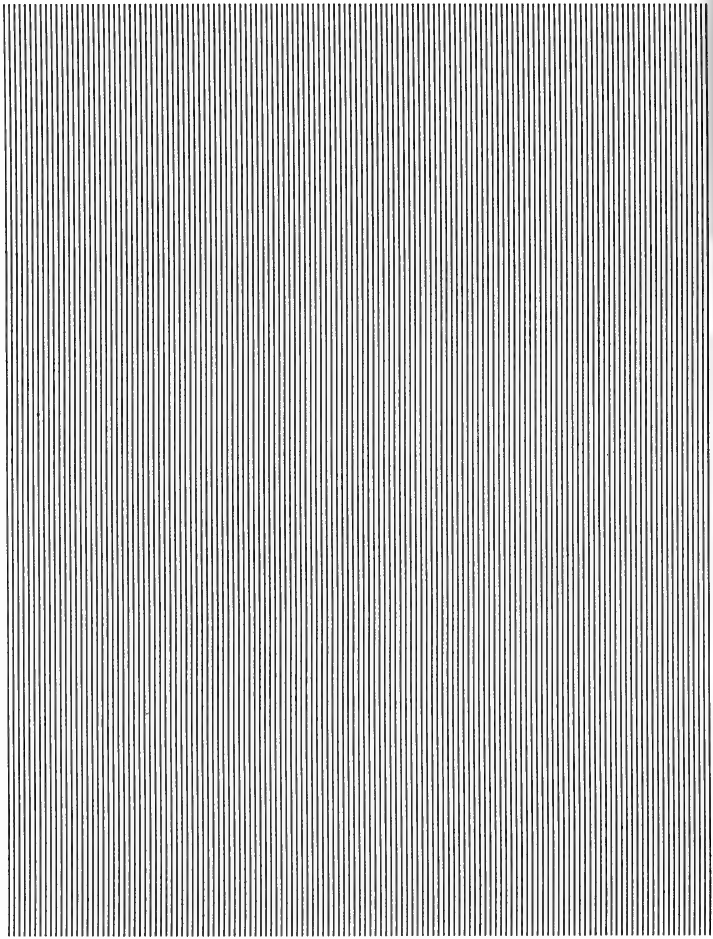
This is a very mordant joke which also brings the issue full circle, 'as it began with a discussion of the Comedian's death and now ends with it. The layout of the last page is identical with the first. Each page begins on a panel with the happy face button previously worn by The Comedian, then the "camera" pulls back and back until the last panel is from a great height looking down. The issue ends

with a symbol of a clock at ten minutes to twelve. Indicating that the nuclear time clock is ticking down towards doomsday.

While **THE WATCHMEN** is the brainchild of writer Alan Moore, it would have been only a half successful experiment if the collaboration with the artist had not been precise. Dave Gibbons turns in the finest work of his career, creating perfectly rendered images capturing exactly what Moore describes in his script. Gibbons doesn't just illustrate what Moore writes, he collaborates to achieve maximum impact with art and design.

This is the work of an artist whose talent is just as explosive as Alan Moore's. He has awaited the right co-creator to bring his images maximum impact. With **THE WATCHMEN**, Gibbons emerges as one of the most important artists in the comic book medium, both for the exuberance of his work as well as for the subtleties of Moore's writing that he captures and brings to life on the comic book page. The work of writer and artist is just as intricately linked on this story as is the work of the writer/artist (such as Frank Miller) who illustrates his own work.

WATCHMEN



WATCHMEN
TWO

WATCHMEN 2

"At Midnight, All the Agents..."

The story opens on a symbolic comparison between a retirement village and a cemetery as the story focuses on the funeral of Edward Blake, The Comedian. The recollections of the past, both by those attending the funeral and by Sally (Silk Spectre) frame the event. Sally's daughter is Laurie, the current companion of Dr. Manhattan. She chose not to attend the funeral with Jon (Dr. Manhattan) because she still holds a grudge her mother long since forgave--that long before Laurie was born, Edward Blake tried to rape Sally.

The mother and daughter have a caustic relationship. Sally is blunt and to the point while Laurie is put off by anything even slightly off-color or unpleasant. She even avoids telling her mother that Jon is at Edward Blake's funeral, but she guesses it easily. We see role-reversal in effect here as the daughter tries to be protective of the mother, but the mother is clearly very thick-skinned.

At the funeral, walking outside the gates, is someone who cannot attend the ceremony because he's an outlaw vigilante. The man is there carrying the sign again, and close inspection reveals this indeed to be Rorschach. There's even a subtle clue in the story when one of the people leaves the funeral and goes home. The man with the sign is outside the gate when the man leaves. When the man reaches home, Rorschach bursts in and asks him why he was at the funeral. In order to know the man had been there, Rorschach had to have been there as well.

So much happens in the story that only in retrospect, after Rorschach has been unmasked, do we see him in the earlier issues. He's so omnipre-

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sent in his masked persona that it never occurs to us that he's also around in his civilian guise. It makes him invisible to us even in plain sight.

The present keeps giving way to the past in this story as characters think back on pivotal events in their lives. Sally Jupiter looks at a group shot of the Minutemen taken in 1940 and recalls that the picture was snapped just minutes before The Comedian tried to rape her. This comes back to her not just from looking at the picture but from knowing that Edward Blake is being buried that day. She jokes about him and doesn't harbor any bitterness--that's all held by her daughter who tends to be judgmental when it suits her, and yet was able to laugh when she learned how Rorschach killed someone by dropping them down an elevator shaft. Laurie is basically unhappy in her middle age and never seems to be satisfied with anything for very long as the story will display.

Her mother, on the other hand, is able to look at things from a broader perspective and accepts more readily. A Tijuana Bible sent to her by an old fan scandalizes her daughter but pleases Sally because it reminds her, "that people used to slobber over me." She goes on to say, "Laurie, I'm 65. Every day the future looks a little bit darker. But the past, even the grimy parts of it, well, it just keeps getting brighter all the time." She then recalls the day Edward Blake tried to rape her!

The attempted rape is pretty brutal, and it's halted by Hooded Justice, whom Blake then threatens: "I'm going. But I got your number, see? And one of these days the joke's gonna be on you." Another episode in a later issue reveals that Hooded Justice disappeared but that a former wrestler was found dead and suspected of being Hooded Justice. So perhaps Blake did one day get back at him.

Alan Moore constantly comes up with interesting segues in the story. When Sally remarks that, "It rains on the just an' the unjust alike...except in California," we cut to the funeral of Blake in New York and see Adrian Veidt--the man we learn much later is responsible for the murder of The Comedian. His face is impassive as he thinks back on the first and only meeting of The Crimebusters, a latter day group of heroes who attempted to form much like the Minutemen had decades earlier. It broke up when The Comedian crystalized how futile their plan to fight social unrest was when nuclear war could destroy the world within 30 years.

Although it's not examined in any detail, Captain Metropolis has defined crime as falling in various categories, including promiscuity, anti-war demonstrations and black unrest. In this way, Alan Moore is pointing up one of the problems of the vigilante, that he is the one who decides what is right and that this can easily be influenced by his own politics.

This scene may have been the moment when Adrian Veidt realized that the world's problems were more complex than good guys in costumes arresting bad guys in costumes. When The Comedian sets fire to the map showing problem areas around the country and then says, "It don't matter squat because inside thirty years the nukes are gonna be flyin' like maybugs," no one notices that while everyone else is arguing , Adrian Veidt is staring at the singed map and thinking. Cut to the funeral in which we see his face in the same profile, but sadder.

The background of Adrian Veidt is not as clear as, say, Dr. Manhattan's, but he may well be the only other true "super" hero. The Comedian keeps referring to him as the smartest man in the world. If this isn't sarcasm but grudging respect delivered in a backhanded manner, this would explain why Veidt feels that he's the only one capable of saving the world. He realizes that the problems are too immense to solve by arresting muggers and otherwise interfering with everyday street crime. The world faces threats on a much greater scale than that.

While Veidt sees that Dr. Manhattan creates a standoff in that balance of terror, he also realizes that were the atomic man to suddenly die or otherwise vanish, tensions would escalate. He sees Dr. Manhattan does on a global scale little more than they did on a national one--arresting and otherwise intimidating thugs. But it doesn't really have a lasting impact. This is what causes Veidt to develop his master plan.

It's at the funeral that, for the first time, we go into the mind of Dr. Manhattan as he recalls an incident of his own involving The Comedian. It was right after Dr. Manhattan won the war in Vietnam. The Comedian was on hand and they were all celebrating when a pregnant Vietnamese girl came in, expecting Blake to take her with him. When he refused, she cut his face with a broken bottle. Blake returned the compliment by shooting her through the heart. It happened right in front of Dr. Manhattan. When the atomic man criticized Blake for

what he did, The Comedian points out that Dr. Manhattan could have stopped him at any time, changed the bullet into gas, but he didn't.

Blake said it's obvious to him that Jon is out of touch with humans and their concerns. This seemed to trouble Dr. Manhattan more than the murder. as it made him see that he no longer had human emotions--he just imitated them. He no longer even understood how to respond in emotional situations nor how his actions impacted on the feelings of others. As Dr. Manhattan looks down at the coffin of Edward Blake, he's also seeing the body of the woman Blake murdered, and seems to feel a curious sense of detachment.

The other visitor at the funeral is Dan Dreiberg, formerly the Nite Owl. He remembers the police strike when he and The Comedian had to help quel civilian riots. But what brought the strike on was the existence of the costumed vigilantes. It was the strike which led to the emergency legislation outlawing the vigilantes, except those in the paid service of the government such as Dr. Manhattan.

This is when we encounter the origin of the phrase, "Who Watches The Watchmen?," which questioned the infallibility of the vigilantes since they answered to no one.

Interesting dialogue deals with the riots when Dan exclaims, "But the country's disintegrating. What's happened to America? What's happened to the American dream?" To which The Comedian cynically replies, "It came true. You're lookin' at it."

After the funeral, when Rorschach confronts the old man who used to be one of their arch foes (Rorschach leaps on the man from out of his refrigerator), Moloch explains that a drunken Edward Blake had come to see him a week before. We now know that this was right after he'd stumbled on Adrian Veidt's monstrous plan and was slowly going to pieces from the weight of responsibility of that knowledge. It's another clue that Rorschach can add to his journal.

During the riots described earlier, The Comedian had referred to Rorschach as being crazy ever since a kidnapping he'd covered three years before. Perhaps this is what finally tipped him over the edge because now the strange masked man seems lost, adrift in society. Everyone is suspect. After assaulting Moloch he quizzes the man about the illegal cancer treatment he's using, as though threatening a dying man has some point.

Even the slightest infraction of the law now seems mammoth in the eyes of Rorschach, unless he's the perpetrator. He's an outlaw himself, a fugitive from the act which outlawed Vigilantes, but this is a law which he doesn't recognize. Rorschach has become a law unto himself, casually breaking into the apartment of his former partner, the Nite Owl, eating his food and remarking only that he should get a stronger lock.

Oddly enough, the fact that Dan does have a stronger lock on the door later is essential. He needs the extra few seconds of time that gives him to escape. Rorschach actually does him a favor by breaking down his door twice. It's another example of the way even little things are connected in this story, as well as how fate can play tricks. The Comedian is a victim of one of fate's jests. If he hadn't glanced out of the window of his plane when he happened to be passing a certain island, he never would have tumbled to Adrian Veidt's secret plan. He wouldn't have been murdered.

The Comedian is the source of mordant observations, such as when Dr. Manhattan recalls the incident with him in Vietnam. After the war is won, and before he's airlifted out, Blake is celebrating the victory and observes offhandedly, "If we'd lost this war...I dunno. I think it might have driven us a little crazy, y'know? As a country." On The Comedian's lapel is his badge of office, so to speak, the Happy Face button which is found in the bloody gutter by Rorschach, given to Dan Dreiberg and then dropped into Edward Blake's grave as though returning something to him that he lost. As Sally Jupiter observed miles away from the scene but at the time the service was taking place, "I guess he finally reached the punchline, huh?" Even this joke cuts two ways because The Comedian died from being punched through a twenty storey window.

Moloch, the former foe of The Minutemen, is portrayed as a pathetic old man who couldn't pose a threat to anyone. He was someone who had adopted a costume as a criminal in reaction to the costumed heroes of the Forties. He later abandoned this for more lucrative low profile crimes, but finally was prosecuted and spent the Seventies in prison. But to Rorschach, who suspects everyone anyway, it's once a criminal, always a criminal.

When Moloch explains what happened that night the drunken, upset Edward Blake came to see him, those 18 panels are almost the same scene over and over again as Blake walks

around the foot of Moloch's bed ranting and raving. We don't even realize that the perspective almost never changes because the coloration alternates every other panel from dark blue to gold, and we're fascinated by what Blake has to say because this man has always been portrayed as being fearless and vicious, but now something has happened which has not only frightened him but made him think about the terrible things he's been responsible for throughout his life.

The strain of contemplating what he discovered is finally pushing him over the edge. We see all this from Moloch's viewpoint. as though he's a camera recording the scene. He'd been afraid that the babbling Comedian was going to kill him and at one point even stated, "You're part of it Moloch ol' pal, y'know that? If I thought you did know...I saw your name on the list, you and Janey Slater, but if I thought you were in on this...I'd kill you."

What's the connection between Jane Slater and Moloch? They both have cancer. Adrian Veidt saw to it that they got cancer so that there would be evidence to back up the wild assertions that Dr. Manhattan was a threat to human safety due to radiation exposure. Again, this is a clue placed before revealing the event it's connected to. In order to understand everything going on in **THE WATCHMEN** you would have to reread all previous issues each time a new one came out. Just as Rorschach in his civilian identity keeps turning up more and more before we know that he's Rorschach, seemingly disjointed pieces of business, such as The Comedian's alcohol-induced confessions to Moloch, all have a point. They not only fitthe scheme of things but do so in large ways.

Another newspaper lying around, this time on page 20, panel 2, has the headline: SOVIETS WILL NOT TOLERATE U.S. ADVENTURISM IN AFGHANISTAN. Just as Nixon won the war in Vietnam and remained president more than two terms (a constitutional restriction no doubt struck down by a grateful, supportive Congress), it was the U.S. who was emboldened by this victory to get involved in Afghanistan. After all, Dr. Manhattan is on our side! It brings to mind the old justification for wars--because "God is on our side." To many, particularly to the other side, Dr. Manhattan has what can easily be described as god-like powers .

The balance of terror is no less easy in this world. If anything, the Soviets are even more nervous that Dr. Manhattan exists

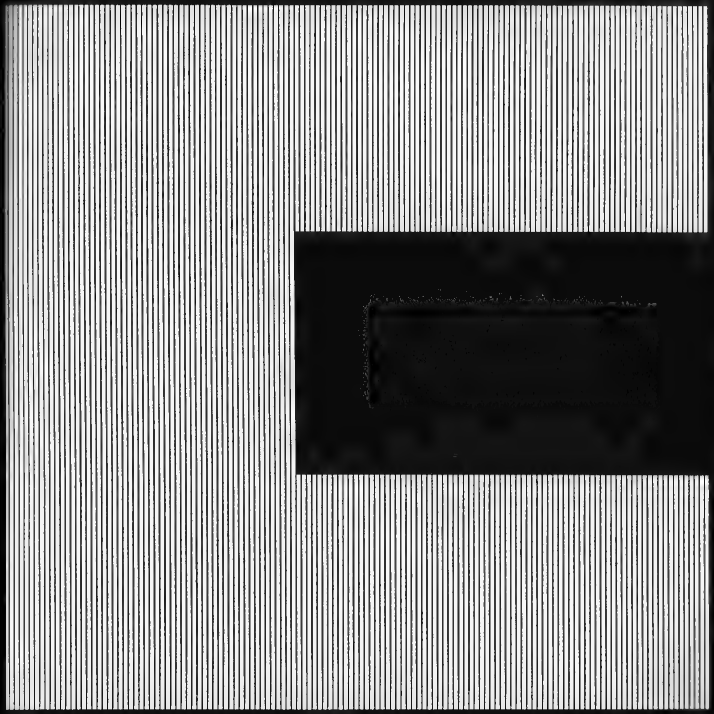
because should the United States send him against the U.S.S.R., nothing could stop him. That was demonstrated when he won the war in Vietnam. But what would happen if the U.S. wanted to use him for purposes of aggression instead of to end conflicts? Would he comply? So far we haven't seen Dr. Manhattan enough to know what makes him tick. In issue three of **THE MATCHMEN** we learn more, although the incident in which he did nothing to stop Blake from murdering the Vietnamese woman is a big clue. Dr. Manhattan has grown increasingly out of touch with not only his own humanity. This is what Adrian Veidt carefully exploits.

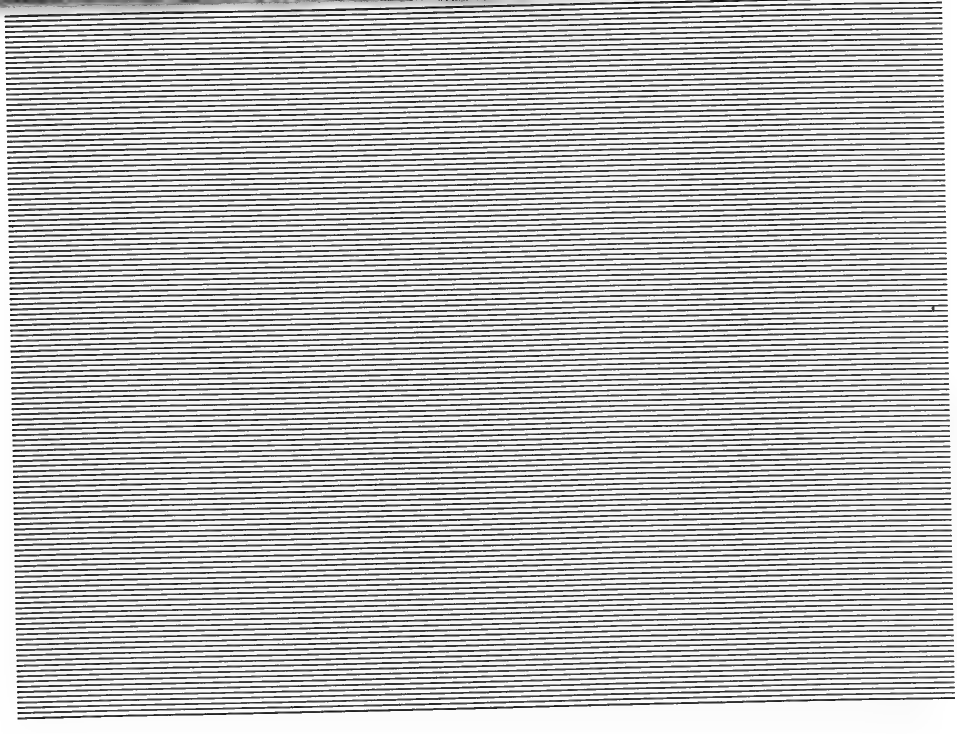
When Rorschach leaves Moloch and walks down 42nd street, we get more insight into how disaffected he is from everything as he thinks, "42nd Street: Women's breasts draped across every billboard, every display, littering the sidewalk. Was offered Swedish love and French love...but not American love. American love; like Coke in green glass bottles...they don't make it any more."

The close collaboration between Dave Gibbons and Alan Moore is again brilliantly demonstrated on page 27 when a joke Rorschach thinks about is illustrated with scenes of The Comedian, standing alone, being picked up by the man who is killing him, crying at the foot of Moloch's bed and finally the now familiar scene of him being hurled through the window to his death. And yet all of these scenes manage to somehow reflect the essence of the joke, a joke about a comedian who can't make himself laugh any more.

The last page once again manages to repeat a motif from the first page. The story opens with Laurie bringing flowers to her mother. The story ends with Rorschach plucking a rose from The Comedian's grave, putting it in his lapel and walking away.

WATCHMEN



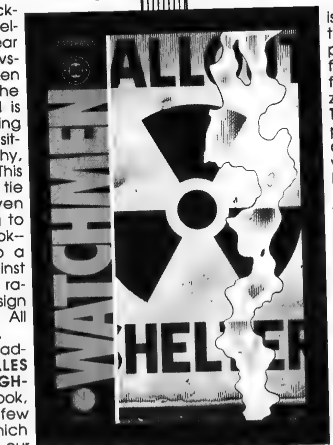


WATCHMEN
THREE

WATCHMEN 3

"At Midnight, All the Agents..."

"We oughta nuke Russia and let God sort it out." That's the first line of dialogue in this volume. The background is the fallout shelter sign being put up near a street corner newsstand. The line is spoken by the vendor while the caption on the panel is from a comic book being read by a young man sitting next to the paunchy, cynical newsdealer. This caption manages to tie into the image even though it has nothing to do with the comic book--the caption refers to a ship's black sails against the yellow sky and the radiation symbol on the sign is black against yellow. All of this in just one panel.



The black youth is reading a comic titled **TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER**, a pirate comic book, which is one of the few genres of fiction which have never caught on our comic book world.

No doubt reflecting the opinions of many people, this news vendor represents the common man, both for better and for worse.

In panel three there is a poster proclaiming that a writer is a missing person being searched for. The sign is on the front page of a magazine called **THE FRONTIERSMAN**, a right wing publication as evidenced by the subhead which asks: CASTRO TO BLAME?

The vendor proclaims that because of all the newspaper headlines he sees, this makes him informed enough to state, "We oughta nuke 'em till they glow!"

Throughout this story the young man reads the comic book and its captions form the panel captions in many scenes. Moore continually manages parallelism with them by tying the theme and observations in the story in with what is being said and going on in a particular panel. For instance, on page 2

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In panel 3, the news vendor observes that he sells more papers when the news is the worst. The comic book caption from TALES OF THE BLACK FREIGHTER observes, "Readers take comfort from this, in Hell, at least the gulls are contented."

The obvious assertion is that people hunger to read about disasters, almost as though they need to feed off of horrors that befall others. But sometimes these horrors, such as the nuclear threat, are threats people need to know more about because it makes their own problems seem consequential in comparison.

The interweaving of the story dialogue with the comic book story continues throughout. Panel 4 on page 2 has the news vendor saying that he understands how everything is connected and doesn't retreat from reality while the comic book caption states, "For my part, I begged that they should take my eyes, thus sparing me further horrors." It's like this every time the comic book caption is used.

When the man carrying the sign (revealed in issue 5 to be Rorschach) appears in this volume, the caption of the panel before, also from the **BLACK FREIGHTER**, states, "And I knew that life had no worse news to offer me."

Then we see Rorschach, or rather the strange red-haired man carrying his sign declaring THE END IS NIGH. He's there to get his copy of a daily newspaper called the **NEW FRONTIERSMAN**, a right wing anti-communist newspaper we'll learn more about later. He's so concerned that he doesn't miss the next issue (even though he thinks the world will end before tomorrow) he comes back moments later and startles the vendor by tapping him on the shoulder, asking him not to forget. It's clear that this strange man with his sign gives the vendor the creeps, just as he does everyone he meets.

The newsstand is on a corner outside of a building which is identified as the Institute For Extraspatial Studies. While showing another difference from our own world, it's also a clue to what is going on. There is active interest in the possibility of life in outer space, and Adrian Veidt takes advantage of this.

The comic book pirate story serves as a bridge between this sequence and the next. When the shipwreck survivor saves the ship's figurehead which had kept him afloat in the water, he remarks, "Her damp embrace had prevented me from drifting beyond reach, yet this small comfort was all I could offer. I could not love her as she had

loved me." This last line refers to Dr. Manhattan, whom Laurie is making love with until she opens her eyes to see two Dr. Manhattans in bed with her.

So shocked she screams, she's even more shocked when she walks into another room to get a cigarette and sees yet a third.Dr. Manhattan working in his laboratory. She's furious to discover that while part of him was in bed with her, another part was working on an experiment. Dr. Manhattan doesn't quite understand what's bothering her but is prepared to discuss it with her.

He's not completely out of touch with his human emotions, just extremely distanced from them. He can still feel, as we soon see.

This segues into a meeting that Jane Slater is having with a reporter, describing an argument that she once had with Jon Osterman, Dr. Manhattan, after J.F.K.'s assassination. She'd said, "Jon, you know how every damn thing in this world fits together except people."

Jane complains that Jon couldn't relate to her emotionally or sexually. She feels that Jon dumped her. A later flashback to such events will reveal that Jon was just looking for someone to talk to who wasn't put off by him, while Jane read other motives into his actions because she just didn't understand that sex or a person's physical appearance meant nothing to him. She interpreted events from her own narrow perspective.

When Laurie walks out on Jon for similar reasons, it seems odd that after about twenty years she wouldn't understand Dr. Manhattan.

Jane Slater is being interviewed by a newspaper, The **Nova Express**, for an exclusive story they plan to break after Dr. Manhattan appears on a tv interview show that night. She's spilling everything since she discovered she has cancer and has been convinced that it was because of her years of association with Dr. Manhattan.

Simultaneously, Laurie is exiting a taxi under a billboard for a perfume called Nostalgia, whose ad line is, "Where is the essence that was so divine?" That certainly refers to the mixed emotions that Laurie has that night.

She decides to visit her old friend Dan, formerly the Nite Owl. She enters just as a locksmith is fixing his door again. And yet even seeing him is a back-handed compliment because when she tearfully explains that she left Jon, Laurie complains that she didn't know who else to talk to about it because she doesn't known any-

one except, "goddamned super-heroes!"

She complains that he looks at things like he can't remember what they are and doesn't care, and that the real world is peopled with shadows so far as he's concerned. Simultaneous with her observations we see Jon sitting on the bed in their rooms, looking at one of her bras. Pages 9 and 10 cut back and forth between Laurie at Dan's apartment and Jon silently preparing to go to the tv station.

Dan is preparing to visit his old friend, Hollis Mason, the original Nite Owl and author of **UNDER THE HOOD**. Their conversation also corresponds to Dr. Manhattan's preparations to go to the tv station. When Dan explains to the locksmith that a friend broke his lock when he was out, the repairman replies that he's got buddies who show up like that, "Completely outta the blue!" That caption is on a panel showing Dr. Manhattan materializing at the tv station, not only frightening the people there but leaving his other cufflink still hanging in the air next to him as he finishes dressing. As we've seen earlier, Jon only wears clothes under special circumstances, such as Edward Blake's funeral or his tv appearance.

Dr. Manhattan's talk show episode runs parallel with Laurie walking Dan to his visit to Hollis. She prefers a walk to taking a cab. When Dan points out that these are bad neighborhoods, Laurie replies, "That's okay. I'm in a baaad mood."

The receptionist at the tv station is upset at Dr. Manhattan's sudden appearance. "They're not paying me enough to handle monsters from outta space!" she complains. Considering what happens in the twelfth issue, this statement is quite prophetic.

A man from Army Intelligence advises Dr. Manhattan what questions he should play it cool on. "...and try not to get into any tight corners," the man says as we see Laurie and Dan walk into a dark alley followed by thugs.

As the talk show starts, with the announcement that they have something really special for the audience tonight, we see Dan and Laurie surrounded in the alley. When Dr. Manhattan is asked whether he's prepared to enter hostilities if the Reds act up in Afghanistan, we see Dan and Laurie looking at one another and silently coming to a decision. They strike out at the thugs, much to the surprise of the muggers. When a reporter asks about the death of a former associate of Osterman's, and whether his death from cancer was quite sudden and

painful, this overlaps Laurie and Dan beating up thugs.

The questioning continues while Dan and Laurie brutally deal with their attackers and Dr. Manhattan is on the receiving end of brutal questions about his former associates suffering from cancer. Dr. Osterman is clearly upset by the news that Janey Slater has cancer as he wasn't told. The man from Army Intelligence calls a halt to the interview but people begin crowding around.

When the government man states that the doctor isn't there to answer questions on intimate moments, we see that Dan and Laurie suddenly realize how close this encounter with the now thrashed thugs has made them feel. They suddenly turn away from one another as though to try to ignore the feelings this encounter has aroused in them.

While they've successfully come through their encounter with the public, Dr. Manhattan isn't so lucky. Being confronted with this idea on the same night Laurie has walked out on him puts him under stress such as he has not experienced in many, many years. He shouts that he wants everyone to leave him alone, whereupon he teleports everyone out of the studio to the parking lot. Then he teleports back to his rooms which are guarded by military security.

When Dan arrives at the home of Hollis, he learns what just happened with Dr. Manhattan and the accusations that were made. But Laurie doesn't know and he doesn't know where she went so that he could locate her.

The neighborhood that Hollis lives in is pretty run down. It's not surprising that Dan and Laurie were attacked. Hollis lives above the car repair shop he runs, but the walls outside are all covered with graffitti. He points out that the whole world will know what happened there.

Back at the newsstand, the **Nova Express** arrives with its screaming headline linking Dr. Manhattan with cases of cancer. The news vendor makes his typical observations criticizing Dr. Manhattan. When it starts to rain and the young man reading the comic book asks to borrow the vendor's cap, he refuses, saying that he doesn't lend things. "It's my philosophy. In this world you shouldn't rely on help from anybody. In the end, a man stands alone." And yet this man, and everyone in America, had always subconsciously counted on Dr. Manhattan to give them security, even if they wouldn't admit it. They believed he'd always be there. But perhaps too many people believed that Dr. Manhattan was

emotionless to count on a very human reaction to rejection.

When Dr. Osterman appears outside the door of his rooms, he startles a soldier who is stenciling a radiation warning on the door. America's secret weapon observes that, "It seems I'm incapable of cohabiting safely either emotionally or physically. Perhaps you'd best tell Ms. Juspeczyk and your superiors that I'm leaving." He states that he's going to Arizona first, and then Mars. The serviceman laughs until Dr. Manhattan vanishes and leaves his suit of clothes behind.

In silence, we see Dr. Manhattan appear in Arizona at the ruins of a former government complex. He finds an old photo on a bulletin board of himself and Janey Slater. He looks at it with an inscrutable expression.

When the red-haired man with the sign shows up the next day to get his newspaper, the vendor observes, "I see the world didn't end yesterday," to which the customer replies, "Are you sure?" The newspaper headline states that Dr. Manhattan has left Earth. One has to wonder how something this vital could have gotten out so quickly. While information leaks from the government to the press all the time in our country, something like this would have had a top security lid clamped on it so that only rumors would abound, not the truth. Our government would do anything to keep something like this a secret. Rorschach is quite right on observing that perhaps the world did end the day before, when Dr. Manhattan left Earth.

Laurie returns to her rooms to find that Jon is gone and the town is being scanned for radiation. When she becomes defensive over the suggestion that this could be her fault, the government man there blows up at her, pointing out that they are all in trouble if "The linchpin of America's strategic superiority has apparently gone to Mars!" He mentions that their psychologists believe that he may never return.

Rorschach appears in Dan's apartment the next morning and shows him the headline. He points out that he doesn't think it's just coincidence that The Comedian and Dr. Manhattan have both been taken out of the game all within a week. When Rorschach leaves, he tells Dan to get a stronger lock and takes the bottle of Nostalgia perfume with him.

At the newsstand, the kid finds that the comic hook he's reading is continued in the next issue and is annoyed, saying he won't buy it. Just then the vendor picks up the paper which was just delivered and reads

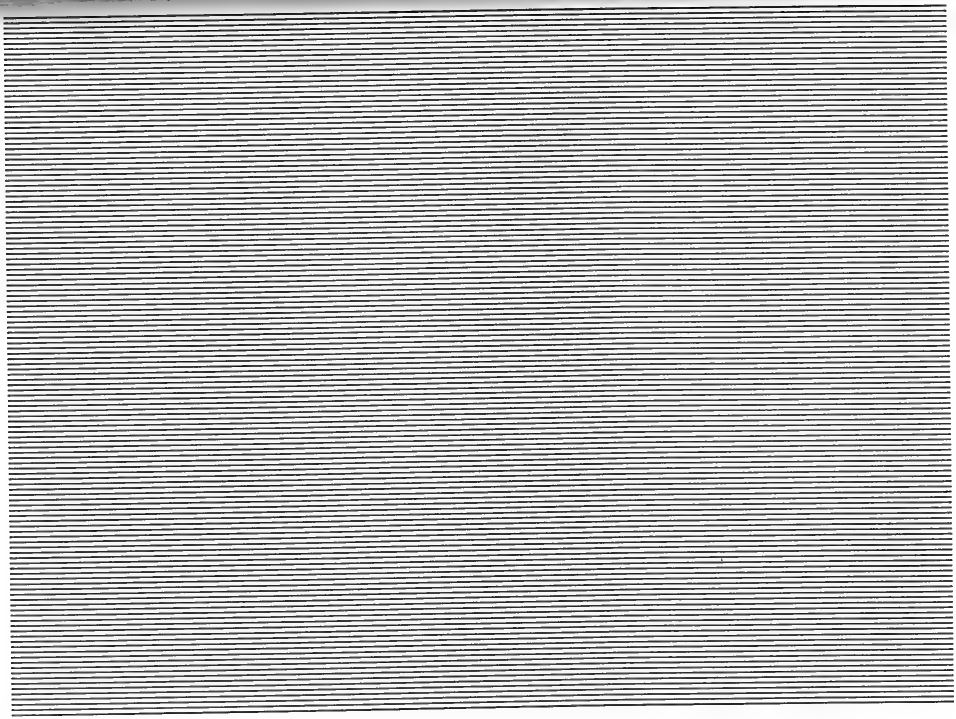
that the Russians have invaded Afghanistan. He tells the kid to keep the comic, gives him his cap and runs home, suddenly blurting out that the kid should be good to his mom. "I mean, we all gotta look out for each other, don't we? I mean, that's my philosophy..," says the vendor. In the face of what seems certain world chaos, he sees what has real value in life now that it seems certain they'll all lose it.

On Earth, President Nixon and the Security Council plot the possibilities. On Mars, Dr. Manhattan walks along as though strolling on a beach without a care in the world. For the first time since we've been introduced to him, he looks happy. He sits down on a rock and looks at the photo of a man and a woman who we'll learn next issue are Jon Osterman before the accident and Janey Slater, both in happier times.

Jon sits and looks up at the sky, at Earth, remembering what was. He's still a man. A man who can be hurt. A man whom no one can truly understand, perhaps most of all himself. He tried to cling to his humanity, to understand how the old fit in with the new. It hurt to believe he had caused harm to those few people whom he shared his days with. It probably hurt more that they refused to understand him even though he tried to be accommodating and apologized when he made what humans perceived as mistakes in conduct. But if anything the humans just made him feel more alone.

He ended their wars in ways they never could. In return they treated him just like Sally Jupiter had observed, as an atomic bomb who needed to be laid once in awhile, when all he really needed was someone who would try to understand him.

WATCHMEN



WATCHMEN
FOUR

WATCHMEN 4

"At Midnight, All the Agents..."

Origin stories always bring their own special share of excitement because more imagination must be brought to bear in the plot than is found in average stories with a comic book character. Plus these stories have an innate drama connected with them as a human being encounters a situation that changes his life forever. All of that sense of dramatic impact and more is captured in this origin of Dr. Manhattan, which is titled "Watchmaker."

Unrevealed until this story is the fact that Dr. Manhattan is able to sense future events, but to him they are immutable, as though they have already happened. While he is in the present he also can see himself in the future and in the past as though such things are happening simultaneously. It's another reason why Adrian Veidt would want him out of the way so as not to have him interfere in his plans for the world.

The illustration of Dr. Manhattan's time sense is done using the photo of Jane Slater and Jon Osterman taken at the amusement park. He holds it, looks at the picture and drops it, but still sees the picture when he's holding it in the past and sees where it falls to the Martian sand after he tires of looking at it. He sees himself retrieving the photo from the derelict bar in Arizona and looking at it is seeing events in July, 1959 at the Pallsades Amusement Park in New Jersey.

When Dr. Manhattan looks at the photo, he sees not only his past with Janey Slater, but his lost humanity that it represents. He also sees himself in 1945 arranging the cogs of a watch on black velvet, fascinated by the inner workings as he plans to follow in his father's footsteps as a watchmaker. Dr. Manhattan thinks about it many times at once: "It's

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WATCHMEN

1945. I sit in a Brooklyn kitchen, fascinated by an arrangement of cogs on black velvet. I am sixteen years old. It is 1985. I am on Mars. I am fifty-six years old. The photograph lies at my feet, falls from my fingers, is in my hand. I am watching the stars, admiring their complex trajectories through space, through time. I am trying to give a name to the force that set them in motion." This is what the story is actually about.

Having the story told from Jon Osterman's point of view, we see how Dr. Manhattan's thinking works. While it is cold and precise, it is not completely devoid of humanity, just different. In one sense his perception has become alien to the normal human way of perceiving things, but beneath it is a layer of sadness. He can do anything, but he can't be human again, although we get the impression that he keeps trying.

Throughout the story we see pivotal moments which changed his life and put him on the path that would bring about the creation of Dr. Manhattan. The first of these is August 7, 1945, when it's announced to the world that the atomic bomb has been dropped on Hiroshima. Jon's father correctly sees that this will change the world and refuses to allow his son to follow him into what he perceives will be an obsolete trade.

The man throws the watch cogs out the window as a rejection of the past. "Professor Einstein says that time differs from place to place. Can you imagine? If time is not true, what purpose have watchmakers? My profession is a thing of the past. Instead, my son must have a future."

Dr. Manhattan sees the past and future as the cogs of a watch falling through the air, but these are all cogs which have a purpose and ultimately fit together to create something.

Jon Osterman enters Princeton in 1948 and graduates in 1958 with a PH.D in Atomic Physics. The cogs fall in the past. In the future Jon sees them as meteorites hailing down through the rarefied atmosphere of Mars. The past and the future are all as one to him, and they all link.

Dr. Osterman arrived at Gila Flats, Arizona on May 12, 1959. A lab assistant there is Wally Weaver, the type of character who would appear as the comedy relief if this were a different kind of comic book. He explains that one of the things being done there is intrinsic Field Experiments to test if there are other forces acting on matter besides gravity. Dr. Osterman

even looks inside the test vault which is sealed against radiation leakage. Objects are tested by separating them from their intrinsic fields. But the impression Wally gives is that this is just a minor side to the experiments being conducted there at Gila Flats.

When Jon is ushered into the bar, we flash to the scene when Dr. Manhattan returned to the long abandoned bar in 1985. This bar on May 12, 1959 is where Jon met Janey Slater. We also see the glass covered bulletin board behind the bar which many military bases have. It's where pictures of personnel who have died are put. There's a similar scene of a bar like this in the movie ***THE RIGHT STUFF***.

Jon's meeting with Janey is the stuff of boy-meets-girl stories, particularly when the guy hasn't had time for a social life in many years. When Jane mentions that Jon is quite young for a research scientist, Jon makes a statement that is prophetic in more ways than one. "My dad sort of pushed me into it. That happens to me a lot. Other people seem to make all my moves for me."

During a trip back east to New Jersey, the photograph which Dr. Manhattan will take with him to Mars in 1985 is snapped in an amusement park in July, 1959. It's the day that Janey and Jon become lovers. It is also the day that Janey's watchband snaps and it falls to the ground, where a lumbering fat man steps on it. Jon offers to fix it as he still remembers what he had been learning from his father until that day when he was sixteen. Once again someone else has made a decision for Jon. By stepping on the watch, the fat man sets into motion a series of events which will culminate in the creation of Dr. Manhattan.

In August, they are back at Gila Flats and Scott remembers that he left Janey's repaired watch in his lab coat hanging in the Intrinsic field chamber. When he re-enters the vault it slams shut behind him and begins cycling. The time lock is in effect and there's no way that Jon can get out.

Although the origin of Dr. Manhattan is one which creates an atomic man, it's not so much like Capt. Atom, which is the inspiration for the character, as it is like Gold Key's Dr. Solar. Capt. Atom was locked in a nuclear-tipped rocket when it was launched into space and exploded. Dr. Solar was trapped in a runaway atomic pile and exposed to massive doses of radiation which killed his companion but not himself.

The concept of the Intrinsic Field chamber is an interesting

one as in one sense it's more harrowing than the other origins in that it's a slightly stranger concept. We're not directly told what the field does because when Dr. Osterman asks what happened when the intrinsic field was removed from the previous fourteen test blocks, we don't know what he's told--we just see his horrified reaction. He pleads for Janey to stay with him in his hour of need, as the chamber has a window from which he can watch her, but she flees, unable to stay and watch the man she loves be disintegrated. You can't really blame her.

Moore deepens the intensity of this moment by revealing the many thoughts going through Jon's head as he faces certain death. As the shield slides back from the particle cannons and it begins to get very warm, Jon thinks of when he first met Janey Slater in the bar and wishes for a beautiful woman to hand him a glass of very cold beer. When Jon is disintegrated, it almost looks as though his skull is smiling. This is August.

In November Jon begins trying to reassemble his body. His consciousness still exists. Thinking back on what he learned from his watchmaker father he thinks, "Really, it's just a question of reassembling the components in the correct sequence..." His experiments bring horrifying results to the others around Gila Flats who don't understand what's happening. They think the base must be haunted. Then on Nov. 22, Jon Osterman rematerializes. He's as hairless and naked as the day he was born, but now he is reborn with blue skin and blank eyes. He appears in the cafeteria, and amid the fear and surprise of those present, Janey is the first to realize who it is.

Since it isn't portrayed, one has to wonder what their reunion would have been like. We see them together next a month later, on Christmas of 1959, but what happened in that month in between? What were his first words to her and to the others? How did they first react to him and how did he describe himself? We see her reaction to him on Christmas. She's afraid. What happened to Jon proves that the word impossible doesn't mean all that it used to. Her perception of reality has been turned on its head. Someone has told her that Jon can do anything, that he's become like God.

The concept of the superman as God is an obvious one, yet it is generally ignored in comics. Since 1963, Marvel Comics has had Thor, the god of thunder, as well as an entire pantheon of gods, but their religious signifi-

cance has studiously been ignored in the comic book stories in spite of Marvel's attempt to otherwise reflect realistic themes. In recent years, Marvel has created more and more powerful characters, culminating in The Beyonder who was capable of altering reality to the point of wiping people not only from existence, but from all memory of having existed. Only Chris Claremont chose to tackle the religious implications of this character as reflected in the shattering of the beliefs of the X-Man Nightcrawler.

At DC, their **CRISIS** series dealt with two mega-powered beings whose battle causes all parallel worlds to collapse and alter reality throughout time and space, leading to the wiping from existence of numerous characters, particularly Golden Age superheroes. But in spite of the otherwise excellent writing on the series by Marv Wolfman, the religious implication of a being who could alter reality was not explored.

While **THE WATCHMEN** does not explore this theme on the street level where ordinary people live, it is confronted briefly after Janey Slater tells Jon that, "They say you're like God now." "I don't think there is a god, Janey. If there is, I'm not him." While not exactly exploring the subject in depth, in just two panels it goes further than Marvel or DC ever have before. When Jon says there is no god, we must realize that this is more than just your average opinion. This character died and three months later recreated himself. He knows what exists beyond death. Perhaps this is what has changed him and made him more remote and withdrawn. He knows how infinitesimal life is on Earth compared with the vastness of the universe and understands that it's all just a matter of assembling "the components in the correct sequence."

While ordinary mortals dream of doing something with their lives that will make a difference in the world, Jon Osterman now knows that nothing that happens in the world can make any difference in the universe, but some part of him keeps fighting to hold on to what his humanity used to represent. As fascinating as the universe and its infinite mysteries are, it's a cold infinity which can be viewed and explored, but never embraced. Deep down Jon is still a man and that human side of him, as obscured and distant as it is, doesn't want to lose touch with the humanity he was first born into and walked among as a normal man for thirty years.

This is often hard to perceive until you go back and note that Dr. Manhattan can be hurt in a

human way. He's upset when he learns that Janey Slater has cancer. He's disturbed when accused of giving that cancer to her and others he's known over the years. When asked point blank whether he thinks he gave Janey Slater cancer by sleeping with her, he becomes furious. As alien as Jon Osterman has become, he still cares about the people who have been close to him. While he is cold and distant most of the time, when those friends are threatened is the only time he ever displays anger. So while he may find it difficult relating to humanity on a grand scale, he can relate to individuals he knows. Beneath his aloof, alien exterior remains a searching sadness.

In the real world, any true superhero (as opposed to a vigilante with a cape and cowl) would immediately be snatched up by the government to exploit like a natural resource. A being who can affect the destiny of a nation would not be allowed to run loose where he could cause real problems in a world governed by delicate political balances. But while Dr. Manhattan could certainly do as he pleased no matter what the U.S. government decided, he has no problems with the demands they make on him. Since he only is called upon to respond and neutralize aggression rather than initiate it, he goes along with it. He does have a brief fling with crime fighting but, as he puts it, "The morality of my activities escapes me."

The government at first markets him like a property, but while accepting the designation of Dr. Manhattan (and the obvious reference it carries with it to the first atomic bomb project), he does not go along with the costume. He rejects wearing a helmet and instead creates a symbol of a single atom orbiting a nucleus on his forehead. He starts changing the world in other ways when he demonstrates that he can create enough lithium to mass-Produce Polyacetylene batteries and thereby bring about the age of the electric, making the internal combustion engine obsolete.

Jon's ability to see into the future creates a conundrum. He knew that JFK would be shot but did nothing to prevent it because to him all time is simultaneous and unchangeable. But while Jon can see the future, he cannot travel there because it hasn't happened yet. And if it hasn't happened yet, he can alter it. But his observations on such things start creating a rift between himself and Janey. Plus the fact that he never ages

makes her feel self-conscious about growing older. When Jon looks as the young Laurie Jupiter at the official meeting of the Crimebusters, Janey is jealous because she still views him on some levels as just another man.

Because he can no longer relate to her sexually unless she asks him to respond, she assumes it's because he'd be happier with someone else rather than because sex to him has become a bodily function he can imitate, but like the others, is one he no longer has. When Janey leaves him in 1966, it's more out of her own feelings of inadequacy (which can only be magnified in one's mind when around a true superman) than because Jon is no longer interested in her. Rather we see that Janey has become so insecure that she can only demand attention without ever delivering any on her own that isn't for the purpose of giving her something she wants. Since she finds it difficult talking to him like another human being, she's given up trying, but still expects him to relate to her exactly as he did before the accident.

On page 21 we see Dr. Manhattan visit Adrian Veidt in the millionaire's Antarctic retreat. Jon had regarded this as the most interesting person he met among the Crimebusters, a group he otherwise felt he shared nothing in common with.

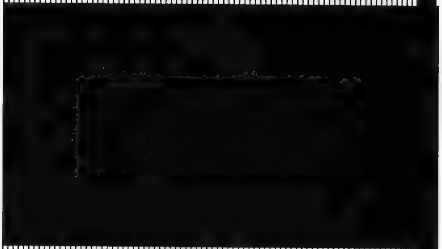
During this private meeting, Veidt, considered the most intelligent man in the world (certainly a superpower of sorts), observes that thanks to Dr. Manhattan, scientists are limited only by their imaginations, to which Jon responds, "And by their consciences, surely?" The distant look in Veidt's eyes when he responds, "Let's hope so," shows that he is still disturbed by the trends he sees in the world.

The power of Dr. Manhattan, as well as his critical judgment, is demonstrated when a crowd of rioters outside the White House during the police strike are teleported back to their individual homes. Two suffered heart attacks from the shock of suddenly finding themselves indoors, but Dr. Manhattan believes the casualties would have been higher had the riot not been neutralized.

That Jon still feels is evident when he thinks about Laurie on page 25: "On a rooftop in the past, I pull her sixteen-year old body to me, breathing her perfume, never wanting to lose her, knowing that I shall."

In the end, Dr. Manhattan stands in the fortress of solitude he has created from the red sands of Mars and contemplates who is responsible for the way of the world.. The quote from Albert Einstein which closes the

story is quite appropriate and itself seems to have dictated Moore's own direction in writing this tale.



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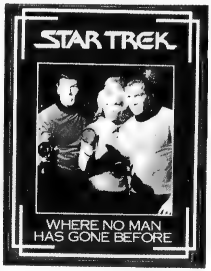

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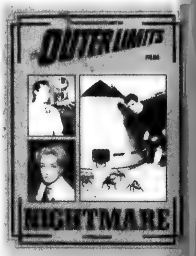

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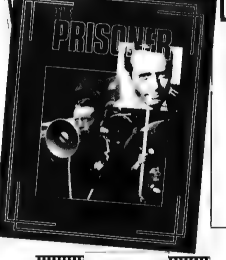

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